



AUBURN

Office of the Provost
University Career Center

PERSONAL STATEMENT WRITING

You may need a personal statement, letter of intent, or statement of intent, or statement of purpose when applying for graduate and professional school programs. These documents challenge you to concisely outline your strengths, goals, experiences and qualifications while demonstrating effective writing skills. This process is going to take a while, so start writing well in advance of the deadline.

Often confused with personal statements, a cover letter contains many of the same elements, but it is presented in a business letter format and is usually shorter and more specific to a job than a personal statement. Cover letters are typically used for job and internships, not for graduate school.

PREPARATION

Before you begin writing, gather documents such as your transcript, resume/CV, and application requirements. Take note of applicable job/internship/volunteer/involvement/research experiences, accomplishments, skills, and personal qualities. Have conversations with those who know you well about what skills, experiences, and qualities make you uniquely suited for graduate studies.

WRITING

Throughout the writing process, remember these guidelines:

Review the Prompt:

Personal statement prompts typically ask you to answer a few questions,

such as “Why are you applying to this program?”, “What are your long-term career goals and how will this program help you accomplish these?”, or “What experiences have you had that will make you successful in this program and in the career field?” To stay on topic, read the prompt carefully before you begin, and refer back to it as you write.

What Makes You Unique?:

Reflect on what makes you stand out from other candidates. Consider your background and what led you to this field, as well as any unique experiences/skills you have gained thus far. For example, describe how an important family member or a volunteer experience influenced your decision to pursue a particular career, or how you gained a useful skill in a campus leadership position or part-time job.

Depth Over Breadth:

Avoid writing long lists of your experiences. This is your opportunity to provide context to your resume/CV rather than rehash all of the experiences you have had. Choose your most influential and relevant work, internship, volunteer, academic, and/or research experiences you had, and share what you gained from them and how you contributed to the organizations. While personal statements vary in length requirements, they are typically limited to 1-2 pages. Be mindful of any superfluous details and condense as needed.

GENERAL FORMAT AND CONTENT

Although requirements for personal statements vary and you should follow the prompt accordingly, below you will find a typical outline for these documents.

Introduction:

The first paragraph sets the tone for the essay. You may choose to introduce a theme or a brief and relevant snapshot of your personal background. Avoid using a famous quote; these should be your words, not someone else's. Then, connect the story to the program, and share WHY you are applying to this particular program. Mention the specific name of the program, as well as the title of the degree, such as Master of Social Work or Master of Science in Biological Sciences. Be sure to double check the exact spelling and format of the degree title. If you can only submit one personal statement through an application platform that will be sent to multiple schools, only mention the type of program you are seeking, such as a Master of Science in Communication Disorders.

Supporting Paragraphs:

The middle paragraphs should answer specific questions from the prompt. Each paragraph should be focused and support a topic sentence. Keep your examples relevant to supporting your qualifications. Consider providing context to items on your resume/CV rather than rehashing the specific details. Think about the big picture and summarize.

Conclusion:

In the last paragraph tie together the various examples and claims you have raised in the essay, and reiterate your interest in this specific program or

position. Think about the conclusion as similar to answering the interview question, "Why should we accept you into our program?". Summarize how your skills, experiences, and interest make you a good fit, and reiterate your interest in the program. You might also mention how this degree is a step towards a long-term goal, or how your research interests are similar to those of the faculty.

FORMAT

- Single-spaced or 1.5 spacing
- Left align all lines
- 1-2 spaces between each paragraph
- Typed in an easy-to-read, 11-12 point font (Times New Roman, Arial, Calibri)
- 0.75"-1" margins
- Include your name at the top of the page(s)

REVISING

Give yourself plenty of time to revise and edit your document. Check spelling, word count, grammar, sentence structure, alignment with the prompt, and general writing style. Do not rely solely on spell-check. Read through the essay yourself out loud and revise any areas that are difficult to understand, overly wordy, or include unnecessary or irrelevant detail. Have others (University Career Center, Auburn University Writing Center, professors, family, mentors, supervisors, etc.) review it as well, and bring the prompt with you when you have it reviewed.

Make sure that the overall tone is positive, you clearly explain your interest in the program and your desired career, and you demonstrate your ability to succeed in a graduate program.